DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 339 EC 141 557

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TITLE Proceedings: National Meeting of Learning Disabled Adults (1st, April 30, 1980).
INSTITUTION President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 26p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adults; *Advocacy; *Learning Disabilities; *Organizations (Groups)

ABSTRACT

The proceedings of the 1980 first National Meeting of Learning Disabled (LD) Adults are presented. Topics focused on the history and current status of the consumer movement among LD adults. The concern of national and local LD groups with problems facing LD adults is traced, and current movements within ACLD (Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities) to reflect these concerns are noted. Awareness and self advocacy issues are emphasized. Statewide groups of LD adults, such as Launch, Inc. in Texas, Time Out to Enjoy in Illinois, and the New York Learning Disabled Adult Organization are described. A discussion of challenges facing dyslexics is followed by reports of seven selected local LD adult groups (including Puzzle People in California, Georgia Association for Adults with LD, and Ohio Council of Learning Disabled Adult Section of ACLD). (CL)

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PROCEEDINGS

NATIONAL MEETING OF LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS

April 30, 1980

Dale Brown

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The President's Committee
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THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
THE UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION AGENCY
THE POSTMASTER GENERAL

Dear Friend,

Thank you very much for attending the Annual Meeting and for your participation in the national meeting of learning disabled adults. I understand it was an exciting and interesting gathering. It was the first time you were invited as a group to our Annual Meeting. We were glad to have you and are pleased at your contribution to the other sessions. I hope you learned as much from us as we learned from you.

For a long time it was said that learning disabled people outgrow their handicap. But, in fact, these handicaps are rarely outgrown. They are only overcome with effort. Like most disabled Americans, you have to work hard to get a job, or to obtain the education necessary to get a job. We, at the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, are going to do everything in our power to make sure you get these opportunities.

We have taken the lead in responding to your concerns. We introduced what we believe to be the first publication solely concerned with learning disabled adults; "Learning Disabilities--Not Just A Problem Children Outgrow." Our staff provides continuing technical assistance to other federal agencies about the concerns of learning disabled adults.

Enclosed are the proceedings of the National Meeting of Learning Disabled Adults held at the Annual Meeting.

Sincerely,

Harold Russell

Harold Russell
Chairman

Enclosure

NATIONAL MEETING OF LEARNING DISABLED ADULTS

On April 30, 1980, The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped convened the first national meeting of learning disabled adults. Fifty three learning disabled adults from nineteen states gathered together to learn about each other's activities and to reach decisions on national goals.

The morning session included two panel discussions on the consumer movement among learning disabled adults. One panel covered its history, and the other discussed what was going on at the present time. After lunch, representatives of state and local self-help groups reported on their activities. Then a general discussion was led by Dr. Charles Drake.

HISTORY OF THE LEARNING DISABLED ADULT CONSUMER MOVEMENT

"I'd like to welcome you," stated Dale Brown, the staff member who coordinated and chaired the meeting, "especially the many of you who came at great financial sacrifice. I know that quite a few of you made extreme efforts to be here, and I want to say that it's deeply appreciated."

Rob Coursin--Former Chairperson, ACLD Adult Committee

Rob Coursin, former Chairperson of the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities Adult Committee, was the first to speak.

"Many of the people in this room started the adult committee," he stated. Evalynne Lundberg, Ed Sickles, a gentleman named Ross Glider, and I worked as a panel, speaking around the country from the early to mid seventies on learning disabilities.

During this time, the ACLD began to recognize that the children were getting older.

Ed, Ross, Evalynne, and I really pulled together in Gettysberg, Pennsylvania, in 1973. We decided that this would really be the turning point, and we'd set up at least one state's organization to include youth and adults. During this time, Ross, Ed, Evalynne, Joe Hart, Charles Tillotson and a number of other people began to meet and decide the best way to do this. We finally divided the state into three sections and each of us took a section.

"We all continued to work together to try to have some

mechanism so this would work throughout the country for ACLD. It was a really time-consuming and difficult problem to try to pull together all of the learning disabled people from all the states all over the country. So we went to the national board with this and spent eighteen months running back and forth to Chicago, trying to set up the basis for this program. And two years ago, in San Francisco we pulled together our first meeting. We had people from many states there.

"We were going to try to change the name of the Association for Children for Learning Disabilities to include adults. In one year, 1979, we had a great deal of difficulty passing the name change. In 1980, we had no problem. As a matter of fact, we had 100 percent support. The name is now Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities. It will be shown on the new letterhead as the old is used up or is scratched and added some place in the corner.

"We were included in voting on the boards. We had people who were on the nominating committee to decide who the next president will be. These are the kinds of things that happened in last year's meetings."

Tom Miller--Former Chairperson, New York ACLD

Tom Miller, who was extremely active in the New York State ACLD Adult Committee, one of the first adult committees, spoke next. "New York State ACLD had a group for young adults for about ten years," he began. "When I got involved, the group was run by parents. It was led by a social worker. He was having problems and the group was having problems, and I got involved. This was about 1974 or 1975. I took over the group, because he decided that he didn't have the time or the energy. Originally, it was kind of a rap session, but as we got to know each other better, we began to do more.

"We planned a conference at New York City's Teacher College on the LD adult. It was called 'The Future is Now.' To my knowledge, it was the first time learning disabled adults were involved in the planning of a conference on LD adults. We worked with parents and the staff of Teacher's College. We got Cruikshank to speak there. Andy Burson, David Pinsley, Jonathan Jerome, and I were involved in this.

"About 16 or 20 LD adults attended. The LD adults expressed their feeling about how it was to grow up learning disabled and deal with school and various agencies. We explained that we didn't outgrow the disability. The panels

and presentations were very representative. We had high-functioning and low-functioning people there. It was clear that there are many types of learning disabilities.

"Legislators, professionals, business people, and panelists attended. Many topics were addressed. Roy Lasky, the Executive Director of NYALD (New York Association for Learning Disabled) at that time, addressed 504, which was new then."

Diane Ridenour--National Coordinator, Time Out To Enjoy

Diane Ridenour, national coordinator of Time Out to Enjoy, an independent consumer-run national organization of learning disabled adults, responded to Tom and Rob before beginning her speech.

"I want to say this about the adult committee. There are some adults who have the guts to hang in there in an already established system. And I'm a renegade. I don't have the guts to hang into an already established system. I tend to hang in there and do my own thing off in a corner someplace."

She then spoke of the history and function of Time Out to Enjoy. "We were established in May of 1977 at the Illinois Convention for Children with Learning Disabilities. We established ourself at 4:00 in the afternoon. We made up our name and elected officers by 8:00 and asked for incorporation money by 8:30. We are now incorporated in the State of Illinois. We don't move slowly.

"In addition, we wanted to at first start as a local group. But it didn't work out that way. We started out very quietly in May. We gave a few presentations and by September we were national already. It scared us to death, I have to admit, because we thought we would start as a small movement.

"Our basic purposes are to educate the public on learning disabilities, to provide resources and referrals for learning disabled adults, and to have self-help groups.

"We don't have a lot of social activities, even though our name sounds like it. Since we began, we've had three parties. We do a lot of advocacy. We are surveying colleges and universities to find out what kind of services they have for learning disabled adults. We testify at hearings, we have rap groups, self-help groups, once a month. One of the other things I try to do is if people want to start other self-help groups, I try to help them. We have a mailing list of approximately 500 persons. Our membership

consists of learning disabled adults over the age of 18. These are voting members. Associate memberships don't vote, but they support the organization. We also have a Board of Directors.

"We service persons who write letters to Time Out to Enjoy. If you ask for a resource, I'll give it to you. If I don't have it, I'll get it. And if I can't get it, I'll send you to the nearest special education department. We have people all functioning at different levels with different types of learning disabilities.

"I haven't attended a self-help group lately. I'm too busy with national. I'm training self-help leaders now.

"We get together, sit down, talk to each other. We talk about what it is like to have learning disabilities. We share coping skills. If somebody has a problem, say finding a job, filling out applications, we might sit down with that person and say, 'O.K., this is how we did it.' We also try to give emotional support."

THE LEARNING DISABLED ADULT CONSUMER MOVEMENT AT THE PRESENT TIME

After Diane's speech, there was a break. Dale began the next panel by saying, "Most of the people you just heard from remain active. 'Time Out to Enjoy' continues to function, and Tom Miller works within New York Association of Learning Disabled. Rob Coursin is public relations director of the Youth and Adult Section of the ACLD Adult Committee."

Susan Hastings--Chairperson, Youth and Adult Section, ACLD

The next panel dealt with what's going on at the present time within the consumer movement. Dale introduced Susan Hastings, chairperson of the Youth and Adult Section of the Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD). Following is Susan's speech:

"I've decided to direct my remarks this morning to all of the many exciting things which are going on within national ACLD right now, focusing primarily on our new Youth and Adult Section. On March 30th /1980/, which was three short weeks after the Milwaukee conference, the executive committee of the national ACLD voted to change our status within the organization from a committee to a section. We had requested the use of the word "division," but because they already

have divisions (Presidential Division, Organizational Division, Governmental Division), they really felt that they needed another kind of word to describe what our functional unit would be. They decided that we would be called the Youth and Adult Section.

"With that change, and at the same executive committee session, there were several appointments made to standing committees of the national board of ACLD. At present we now have seven learning disabled adult consumers actively involved in and members of seven of the standing committees of the national board. We also have an LD consumer representative on the program committee for the 1981 International Conference to be held in Atlanta next February. I am that representative, and as such I will be coordinating the strand for learning disabled adults and the postsecondary strand, which also concerns learning disabled adults.

"Another exciting development is that the theme of next year's International Conference is going to be 'Coming of Age.' I think there is going to be a primary focus on the learning disabled adolescent and adult throughout the entire conference.

"Some of the things which we as a Section have developed as objectives for our section within ACLD I have typed up as a summary of what we are doing, just briefly. I don't make any claims to have typed it in any very readable fashion, but I did bring along a taped copy of it so if any of you need to listen to it I can circulate that tape. I didn't have time to make any more than one, but that taped copy is available.

"To review those items on the handout for you very quickly, our major objectives, although not necessarily in priority order, are to increase the awareness of the strengths and needs of learning disabled consumers. This means within ACLD as well as within the general public. Another major objective is to increase the involvement of learning disabled consumers within the ACLD organization. We made as one of our major goals to increase the input that LD consumers would have into the committee workings of national ACLD. As a result of that we have had members of our section appointed to, as I said before, seven of the standing committees of the national Board.

Perhaps it would be worth sharing with you what those committees are. In the President's Division, we have Rob Coursin on the Nominating Committee-which was a very exciting event, because he was elected at the General Assembly meeting at the national conference and was elected by popular vote at the assembly, which suggests a very wide range of support throughout the association for learning disabled consumer representation. In the Organizational

Division, we have representatives on the Membership Committee and the Resolutions Committee. In the LD Movement Division, we have a representative on the Elementary Education Committee. In the Adult Services Division, we have representation on the Post Secondary Committee, on the Secondary and Adolescent Affairs Committee, and on the Vocational Committee. And then of course we have our own Youth and Adult Section, which is comprised primarily, and almost exclusively, of learning disabled consumers. There are a few associate members who are there trying to be supportive.

"Another one of our Section's major goals is to encourage the formation of youth and adult groups throughout the country on a state and local level. To achieve this goal, we are cooperating with the Membership Committee of national ACLD to develop some kind of guidebook to give suggestions and ideas about how to find other learning disabled adults, how to get them together, what kinds of programs have been successful, what kinds of organizational attempts might be appropriate for different kinds of groups, and that sort of thing. At the present time we have approximately 18 states that have active groups, varying in size from three members to as many as 80 members. But there are 18 states that have reported having some kind of division of youth and adult, or youth and adult group (they all call them different things), and there are about another dozen of the state ACLD organizations that have appointed advisory people within their state boards to look into and help get this kind of group going.

"Another one of our major objectives is to promote the concept of self advocacy among learning disabled consumers and to provide some kind of training in that. We are working right now to have the Wednesday preceding the actual opening of the national ACLD Conference to be a short course for the entire day in assertiveness training and self advocacy training specifically directed to us--the learning disabled consumers--to give us some concrete skills and knowledges in order to become better self advocates. This short course is being developed in cooperation with the Advocacy Committee under Dorothy Crawford, who is probably one of the most supportive people we could ever want to have among us.

"Another one of our major objectives is to promote the development of social skills among our population. The group that gathered on Milwaukee felt very strongly that one of the things that gets in our way as learning disabled consumers is our frequent inadequate ability to be appropriate socially. Many of us have severe social problems and we feel very strongly that accompanying self-advocacy you need to develop some kind of social skills that would be appropriate and useful to help you gain acceptance and

just be better people.

"Another one of my special goals that I'm involved in right now is improving the accessibility of the many many resources available through national ACLD by establishing a tape lending library to get all of the many resources that are available at the ACLD office on to tape and to develop some kind of a distribution plan and process so that those of us who can't read very well, and those of us who can't read at all, can have those materials available. There are a lot of good resources that we just can't use because we can't read. I am in the process of writing a grant to fund this project.

"Those are really the primary goals of our section and the things to which I am devoting the greatest majority of my time at this point.

"However, throughout the entire national organization in the Committee structure there are many exciting things happening--the Vocational Committee is working hard to develop several different kinds of materials and advocacy programs and working with the vocational rehab people in advocating for learning disabled adult consumer needs. One thing I am very excited about and pleased to have the opportunity to share with you is that the executive committee at the end of March the Board of Directors of ACLD read my resolutions (those of you who have heard them) and they attended to them and were excited. They appointed the Advocacy Committee to investigate cases that are now pending, to look for the best case--the one that has the best chance of coming out with a positive finding--and, in fact, they are searching for three cases (one at the elementary level, one at the secondary level, and one at the adult level) and they fully intend to put all of the weight of ACLD behind those three test cases that they find in order to hopefully establish a positive precedent with the enforcement of of 504 with respect to learning disabled consumers. I feel like that is something that ACLD was struggling with, not knowing how to deal with. They have established a friend of the court status which I don't understand fully, but seems to provide a vehicle through which ACLD can accomplish these ends."

John Moss--Founder, Launch, Inc., Texas

John Moss, member and one of the founders of Launch, Inc. of Texas spoke next. Launch, Inc. is an independent statewide consumer group of learning disabled adults.

"Launch, Inc. was started in November of 1978 at East State Texas University, with the help of Texas Association for Children with Learning Disabilities. They provided three

hundred dollars of seed money for our operations.

"We chose to seek our own destiny. We were sold on the concept that only LD adults can speak for LD adults, and we put those priorities first. We did not want to be limited by the rules, regulations and policies of other organizations. We felt it was necessary to take a stand for LD adults' rights even when it was in conflict with other organizational concerns.

LD adults can do anything. We are bright, capable and creative. We can organize, raise money, and govern ourselves. We have shown this by our action in Launch, and we believe that our action has been successful.

"We have worked with the Texas ACLD. As a matter of fact, our Annual Convention is held with them. And we stay in contact with all their local groups. The Orton Society has also been very supportive. The Texas CEC and their Division of Children with Learning Disabilities have also provided assistance.

"We appreciated these people, but we felt it was and is important to set our own course. We were chartered by the State of Texas in February 1979. We gained IRS tax exempt status in July 1979, and we are now busy establishing Launch stations--that's what we call our local groups.

"We have adopted some legislative positions that we're now pushing in Texas. We have given testimony before the appropriate committees and have attended hearings. We have joined a group called the Texas Committee of Organizations for the Handicapped, which is a lobbying type group in Austin, there we have a representative who brings our concerns to the state lawmakers.

Our first position is that we are trying to make differentiated testing available automatically for LD adults at every testing site in Texas. We feel that if a person identifies himself or herself as an LD adult, there ought to be modifications made to fit their needs: extended time, oral tests, somebody to write responses, somebody to read the questions, several sessions for extended testing. All of these things should be available for LD adults.

"The second thing that we're pushing is to place competent, professional advocates for LD adults and other handicapped adults in every institution in Texas, and we want these positions paid by Texas state funds.

"Our acronym, LAUNCH, stands for Leadership, Action, Unity, Nurture, Citizenship, Harmony. We are now planning our second annual convention for San Antonio in October of 1980. We have established leadership of LD adults in every major metropolitan area of Texas. A newsletter is

being published. Meetings are being held. The climate is changing to positive. We have approximately 500 people on our mailing list for the newsletter. We have about 150 paid members. Articles are being written, research is being published on the concerns of LD adults, things are happening at Launch Incorporated, the coalition of LD adults.

"There is one area we are seeking for LD adults and that is a coalition of groups at national level for adults with language, learning, and educational disabilities. We feel that this is an important next step. We do not want to be subservient or affiliated in our direct or day-to-day operations with non-LD adult organizations. We want a national organization that will stand on its own. There are from twelve to sixteen million disabled adults out there in the United States. They are waiting out there to be mobilized and to speak with a unified voice. When this happens we will have reached another milestone. We want every group to advocate for us if they will, but we must stand for our own cause, and I think that's important.

"The Launch group has in its hands a little thing that we've prepared for your consideration over lunch. It's a proposal to establish LD national organization. They're going to pass it out to you. If you could read it over lunch, maybe we can do some discussion after lunch.

"We meet in individual stations...in the major metropolitan areas. We have several stations in some areas such as in Dallas. We work with several postsecondary institutions, trying to get them to be considerate of our needs. In East Texas station, we have a very active group on campus. We have a very active LD adult program on campus at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral level.

"We have people aged 18 to---I guess our oldest member is 60 or 65. Almost two-thirds of our members are female. We have people of all ages. We have some younger members in Dallas who are looking into independent living. About 16 of them formed an independent living group. Our younger group is into driver education, sex education, things like that. We try to help them with counseling and personal adjustment. Our older group is into educational and employment opportunities."

Nonnie Star--President, Adelphi - Long Island - New York Learning Disabled Adult Organization

Nonnie Star, a social worker and program coordinator for learning disabled students at Adelphi University, spoke next. She founded and organized the Adelphi-Long Island-New York learning Disabled Adult Organization

(ALINYDAO) and serves as its president.

"I am a learning disabled adult," she stated, "who has a short-term memory deficit, so I am going to read."

"I come to you with a heart full of anticipation because of the opportunity that has been given to me to share my group's experiences.

"My hopes are based in the firm belief that the way we can best assist the learning disabled person is to all unite to form a national organization of learning disabled adults so duplication and fragmentation doesn't occur. Learning disabled adults are here today from all over the country. We are no longer alone. We will deal with the problems at hand realistically and constructively.

"Learning disability has always been with us. However, because most learning disabled adults were never diagnosed as having this invisible disability, they thought of themselves as dumb, stupid, or retarded. And if not, they knew inside they were different and struggled with much courage to hide it from others. There was no labeling long ago. Some of us dropped out, flunked out, were left back, struggled, or were the clowns of the class.

"By being here today, making our invisible disability visible, we are going to meet success. The time has come. This conception of who and what we are must be communicated through the media and from meetings like this to all people in all walks of life.

"If there had been a learning disability adult organization at the Adelphi Social Work Center when I was a student, I wouldn't have felt so frustrated and lonely. After all these years of trying so fiercely to hide my feelings of being so ill at ease, I had to listen to all my textbooks on tape, tape all my classroom assignments, and make believe I didn't hear or see some of the other students make fun of me.

"For all these reasons and many more that I felt the urgent need to form the Long Island-New York Learning Disability Adult Organization at the Adelphi Social Work Center. As a student, I became an advocate and crusaded and fought for the rights of other LD students and adults on the Adelphi campus and in the community. I went before the University Committee on the Handicapped and convinced them that learning disabilities WAS a disability. The formation of ALINYDAO is a direct outgrowth of the sense of concern as well as the staff and administration regarding LD.

"A public relations method was used to inform the community of this organization. The methods used include

TV (I was on TV-Channel 21), linkage with ACLD, radio stations and newspaper coverage. Learning disability workshops were given finally to the following groups of people: special PTA groups, schools, mental health staff members, educational organizations, industry personnel, the Orton Society. Learning disabled adults sent mailings and newspaper clippings about our organization. Fliers were hung in libraries and doctor's offices. Heavy PR work is being done for the education of professionals as well as laymen.

"And so the organization grows. Learning disabled adults are meeting one another. Together they share past experiences, exchange ideas, and learn how to cope more successfully with their environments. New educational, tutoring and employment opportunities are being explored. As each member began to share his experience, it became apparent that each had a different type of learning disability, but all shared similar experiences of loneliness, despair, hopelessness, and pain. The motivation to share ways to overcome and compensate is our force. Our group is NOT a therapy session, but a self-help network for the LD adult lending educational, social, and legal support.

"Our goals are to provide all services to the LD adult, to help remove the prejudices, stigmas, and misconceptions that have accompanied learning disabilities in the past and to provide appropriate remedial help to aid the members of our learning disabled adult organization with their academic deficits. Pretraining for high school equivalency diplomas, etc. is being offered.

"LD adults in the New York-Long Island area are being recruited to lead other LD adult organizations. We are assisting the government in developing resources and legislation for the civil rights of the learning disabled person. We are helping the learning disabled adult in finding and making effective use of resources. The success of learning disabled adults in industry must be communicated to the world of business and to all professionals involved in the human services.

We hope to establish a hotline. This service would be staffed by the people in the group and a social work intern. Information about learning disability schools, vocational services, testing, resource films, and personal encouragement would be offered. An information and referral resource hotline book for the learning disabled would be written for the use of the hotline staff members and would be given out to all agencies and all LD organizations. We will write a newsletter about what we are doing and our special projects. And a fund-raising project is being

discussed.

"In Touch" is New York's only newspaper on the air. The closed circuit radio is free to all blind and handicapped people. They need our help to get money so more free sets can be given out. Possible expansion of facilities to other radio stations in Long Island is a long-term goal.

"Another long-term goal is the adult learning disability friend-to-friend program. The program could assist younger learning disabled adolescents in meeting daily life needs and social activities.

"In concluding, I believe our group members are more fully realizing their potential. Learning disabled adults can do more. But because of public misconception in education and employment practices, they have been denied this opportunity. The distinct advantages of a meeting like this will hopefully produce positive changes on a national level for the understanding by the public of what a learning disabled adult really is. It is above all most important that all groups unite today in order to reach our common goal for better education and employment opportunities. Thank you."

Dale Brown--Director, Association of Learning Disabled Adults

Susan Hastings, one of the panel members, requested that Dale Brown talk about Association of Learning Disabled Adults, a self-help group in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, "which she formed as a volunteer."

"Actually, my talk about ALDA was supposed to be in the history section," Dale said. "So I'm going to be doing both the history and what's going on today."

"We began in March of 1978, as a chapter of Time Out to Enjoy. We called up around 41 professionals and said, 'Look. If you do turn away a learning disabled adult, please refer them to us.' We held our first organizational meeting in May of 1978, mostly with students from a nearby community college. Gale Bell and I worked together in the early stages. She is the hero of ALDA. She made a tremendous sacrifice--lending out her phone number for quite a few fliers. She edits our newsletter, keeps our membership files and does an extreme amount of work.

"We began as a social rap group and we met about twice a month. We held two types of meetings, open and closed. In open meetings, we invited parents, professionals, and all sorts of people. In closed meetings, we met among ourselves to discuss coping skills and things we thought were of interest to us.

"We then began a public relations campaign with many local papers. This campaign was really good in terms of what it did for learning disabled adults. But I would like to mention that it totally overwhelmed us. We were in the Washington Post and got about 200 phone calls. We had a crowded meeting with about 60 people. We were not able to serve everybody, so we had to cut off the public relations campaign, so we could deal with the people who we had. I'm bringing that up, because it's important that people realize that before they begin a public relations campaign.

"At a certain point, I went on a job hunt. On this job hunt, I used a technique called "interviewing for information" where I visited different people and asked them questions. I had decided that I wanted a public relations job in a group that advocated for handicapped individuals. So what I did was visit many groups that advocated for handicapped individuals, told them about Association of Learning Disabled Adults, and also mentioned that I was looking for a job and that I was interviewing them.

"Before I met with these individuals, I contacted interested organizations, including ACLD, to see if there was anything they wanted me to communicate. Then I went and visited. The people I was to interview showed so much interest in learning disabled adults, that I never once got a question answered about my jobhunt!!

"Many people wanted to do stories on us, so we ended up with lots of national level publicity. By then we were sophisticated. We gave only our p.o. box number! Several of our volunteers wrote articles for national publication. Then I did get a job at the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped after they wrote a story on Association of Learning Disabled Adults in Disabled USA.

"We have, at this point, several goals. The first goal is public relations. We're trying to make a good name for learning disabled adults. The second goal is social. We continue our meetings and recreational activities. The third goal is sort of educational. We want to encourage professionals to get into the field of learning disabled adults.

"Now, when I first started ALDA, I was under the impression that professionals didn't do anything with learning disabled adults. What I found was that each of them was working with one or two or three of us, and was convinced that they were the only one. The would say, 'Gee, you know, there's not much going on. I'm the only one in the field.' I was soon helping professionals form a network among themselves. I was saying, 'Oh, no, so-and-so is working with them. Give so-and-so a call.

And that network began to form, and that's an important part of what we do.

"We also provide education for professional groups. And we invite professionals to many of our meetings. We do outreach to other chapters. When we started, we founded ourselves partially as a model chapter for other people to follow. And many people have. And I have spent a lot of time consulting with people who have started groups.

"I'd now like to introduce our board. Mark Derbyshire saved ADLA. We had a problem. We needed a treasurer. All of us had reversal problems. I'm not kidding around!! We nearly fell apart! But Mark Derbyshire stepped in and is now our treasurer and has filed the papers for our tax exempt status.

"Brian Fleck isn't here, but he runs our Virginia Chapter.

"Mike Issard ran our social committee for about a year, running many activities for ALDA.

"Gale Bell, our vice-president, was already introduced.

Dale then spoke for some people who weren't there. "Marge Wilson, she stated" is working within a nationally known recovery group of alchoholics to bring to their consciousness the relationship between learning disabilities and alchoholism. She believes that many learning disabled people do turn to alchohol.

"Somebody named Mary Grigar feels that the LD movement, at this time, is dominated by college-educated learning disabled people. She said that we should be sure to remember that many learning disabled people either just graduated from high school or did not graduate from high school.

"Maria Bacigulpo is organizing a Association of Learning Disabled Adults in Massachusetts. She is a teacher at Curry College.

"Jeffrey Barsch and Charlotte Johnson are at a conference called 'Opportunities for Disabled People in Education' in Minneapolis. They are representing learning disabled people at the conference."

Dr. Charles Drake--Headmaster, Landmark School, Pennsylvania

A lunch break was declared. Afterwards Dale introduced Dr. Charles Drake, the headmaster of Landmark School. "He has a Ph.D. in Education from Harvard, and is a dyslexic person." she said. "He will make a brief speech, and then lead our afternoon discussion."

"I'd like to begin by saying that I like audacious people, and if I ever saw a group of audacious people, it's this one" he said. The audience laughed and cheered. "Because there are at least 12 million adult dyslexics in this country. And that's using the minimal figures that Myklebust describes in his studies in the Chicago area. I personally think he's probably a little low, but at least 12 million. And for 60 people to sit in a room and imagine we're going to impact anything of that size really borders on the ridiculous, doesn't it? And every other successful group that ever started faced exactly the same thing.

"But there is a wonderful experiment that I once saw on TV of a large piece of steel suspended by a single cable. A man was standing there throwing a rubber ball also mounted on a string against that piece of steel. And it took him three days of continuous working at that task until suddenly the steel shuddered and began to swing with that ball. I think we're an awfully small ball at this point, but it's amazing what can happen if people really keep at it. I had the feeling as I listened this morning that this is not a group that's afraid of keeping at it. I think what wee need to do for the rest of this afternoon is to say 'How are we going to keep at it?' What are the thrusts that we all need to tune in on and where do we go from here?

"It seems to me that this is a time that is very precious in this movement, because we are not locked in to any one particular thrust. We are not given over to one point of view. Now we will continue this dialogue after the next item on the agenda." He turned to Dale.

Robert Ruffner--Director of Communications, The President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped

"My boss, Bob Ruffner, is here to talk to us about what the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped can do for learning disabled adults. Bob Ruffner is my boss. He is director of Communications for the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped. He has been a real pioneer in public relations for disabled people. He was the first person to do an ad campaign showing disabled people as people, real people leading real lives, not as super-cripples or as real pathetic. He also has a son who is learning disabled and has shown a great concern for the needs of the learning disabled adult. To be specific, many of you have seen 'Learning Disabilities, Not Just a Problem Children Outgrow.' Bob coordinated the putting together of that brochure. Now I am going to turn it over to Bob."

Thank you, Dale," he said. "I am really here for several reasons. Dale has asked me to come by to tell you how the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped can help learning disabled adults. I like to feel that in a very large way we have already begun that work and I am not only referring to our brochure. I am also referring to our hidden weapon in the field of learning disabilities. That hidden weapon is Dale Brown.

"So I think we're well on our way to nationally recognizing the existence of learning disabilities among adults and recognizing the fact that learning disability is a genuine disability, one that should be covered and protected by those government programs and legislation set up to assist disabled people.

"One of the major problems for learning disabled people is that nobody-- or few people outside of the people in this room and some professional gatherings-- knows what a learning disability is all about. There's a lot of confusion and a lot of contradiction. We want to help you put across the concept of what a learning disability is--and the fact that it does exist among adults--and that learning disabilities do constitute a problem in adult life--and that learning disabled people need the assistance of the programs that are available to all disabled people.

"Well, that's basically all I have to say. I wish you all the best of luck in this very exciting meeting. I think progress is being made. I think visibility is needed. And the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped stands by ready to help you present a positive image of learning disabled adults throughout the United States. Thank you very much."

Dr. Drake then continued his speech. "I think this is a time that is ripe and pregnant for what we are going to try to do this afternoon. That is getting together in an effective way and make our needs and voices heard and turn what is often called a disability into an ability.

"I suddenly realized for the first time this morning that I am in the position of having turned a disability into a career. And I've always said, God save me from the professional dyslexic!'

"In my own background of twenty-five years in the field of learning disability, we have so often dealt with impressions, with suppositions, with theorizing. We need some pretty hard data, if we are going to make any progress.

"For example, one of the things we've learned this morning is that even though men are four times more likely to have learning disability as women, there is only one group reported to have a 50/50 relationship. All the other groups seem to be predominantly women, which is fine. I'm all for this, as long as we know what's happening. So I hope we all share as much hard data as possible, because it's only as we face the reality of the situation as it is, that we are going to move ahead on any realistic path.

"As I have experienced working with adults, the following dimensions were not brought up this morning. I would like to mention them, so we can hopefully see that it's a very broad sweep that we have to deal with.

The first of these is a group in the early 1960's in Boston of adults who could not read well enough to pass any known literacy test. That group still exists. Seventy percent of the adults who came into that group clearly fell within the dyslexic category. We are in the process

of restarting a summer program of that sort in connection with our school because of a second phenomenon that we have discovered.

"There are many people in blind alley positions because they cannot read or write well enough to meet new literacy requirements within their jobs. For example, we got a call from a personnel officer in Rte. 28, our industrial belt. He said, 'Can you help a man in his late 20's? He came in as a technician, he's going to have to write reports and he says he can't read or write. He's absolutely refusing to move out of where he is.' I could go on for an hour telling you stories of how people get blocked because they do not have literacy skills to move forward.

"The third area I have heard nobody talk about is parents of dyslexic kids. Some of our most effective work with learning disabled adults has been with the parents. Because what you do is you start talking about the child's problem and you end up talking about the parent's problem.

"I think we have an almost unlimited field to explore. If there's anything I hope I can leave behind in terms of input, it's that we not get locked in to one particular model or one particular group or seeing one particular need. (Applause) I would hate to see such a promising organization as this get sidetracked into that direction.

"It seemed to me to be a good idea to hear what really is going on across the country in addition to what we heard this morning. Because it seemed to me that unless we really get to know each other and where we're coming from, the talk of any additional organization doesn't make very much sense. I'm going to call on people to talk about who your people are and what you're doing. That's a simple bedrock data bank that we're trying to fill. And you can talk up to five minutes!! Notice I said 'up to'" five minutes, the hook comes out and you're gone."

REPORTS OF SEVEN SELECTED LOCAL LD ADULT GROUPS

Joanne Haseltine--The Puzzle People in California

"The Puzzle People in California is an organization. I founded in August of 1977 with six adults, all males at the time. The main difference between my group and the rest of the groups you are going to hear from is I'm dealing with a much lower functioning level of learning disability. I hate to label or put the difference, but I think the difference is that many of the young adults have not had the opportunity that many of you have had here.

"My main goal in the group is socialization. The only activity they have each month is the activity I provide. We just go out and have a good time, because the majority of them have not had that kind of chance. They've continuously had **failure** situations. Never has anyone in this group been put down.

"It's never had any professionals involved. I have been open to them. I keep saying, 'Come see us. Come join us.' So far, no one has really other than John Arena, the publisher of Academic Therapy.

"The group got started because of John. He had tried to start a group himself, but without fail nothing would happen. And one day my mother opened her mouth and said, 'What about Joanne starting a group?' Now I think she's a little sorry. The mail and correspondence of people inquiring of how they get a group started is just overwhelming for one person to handle.

"I publish a monthly newsletter. It has a subscription list of about 200. It reaches people as far away as Nova Scotia and Canada.

Richard Kaplan--Georgia Association for Adults with Learning Disabilities

"I'm from Georgia. The adult organization has been in existence now for approximately three months and it's taken a lot of work. I'm not going to repeat. Some of the same situations have been going on across the country apparently, so I'm not going to get into exactly what we're doing.

"But we're working on publicity. I sent out a letter recently to a talk show.

"The age range is from 24-49, 50-50 male-female. We only have ten members at the present time, but a lot of phone calls have been coming in. Many organizations in the Atlanta area have been calling up.wanting to know what's going on, so it looks good.

"By the way, ACLD in Georgia is being super-supportive. We're going to be part of their charter. We've been attending their monthly meetings as of the month before last. It's going very well.

We're mostly married couples. This is not a youth organization. It's strictly adults. Youth cannot join. It was decided by the members because of emotions, and adults don't want to discuss their problems in front of kids.

Kandy Schaeffer--Missouri

"Our group doesn't have a name yet. There's approximately 25-30 people on our mailing list. We are predominately male. Originally I was the only female in the group. We started out with seven. At the moment the youngest one is 20 and the oldest one is 30. We say you have to be 18 or over to join.

"We are mostly a rap group at the moment. We are primarily involved with how to get through school and how to get and keep a job. A lot of us are like the group called The Puzzle People that said you were kind of lower functioning in the sense of not having had the experience. Some of us are through college. Some of us have never even graduated from eighth grade. So it's a mixed batch there.

Susan Kirschner--Ohio State University

"About a year ago this month, I started to organize the dyslexic students on this campus. There are over 50,000 students at Ohio State and I knew other dyslexic students were going through the same problems I was having, so I decided to get them together. We started with two people, another man and myself.

"Today we have 60 people on our list and the meetings have about 15-30 people. We have them at our reading specialist's house.

"The students who come to us are those who have been diagnosed as dyslexic students through the Office of Physically Impaired on campus. They are told about the group. If they want to contact us they'll contact us, but I also get some of their numbers too and contact them, but we do have some problems with that.

"Basically, young freshmen come a lot. They're having a lot of problems with their professors and they need to have the information to get through school.

"We just basically get together and talk about their problems and show them that they are not the only ones that have this problem. And that if they identify themselves to their professors they can get what they need, and they don't have to suffer through reading their own tests and taking their own notes.

We have speakers come in to teach us about disability. We have the English Department and the Counseling Service come in to learn more about us and what they can do to help us. There's also going to be a program for dyslexic students

in the university starting in fall, because we have showed them that there are enough dyslexic people and the program is necessary. We have an in-service training grant to sensitize the faculty."

Dave Saunders--Ohio Council of Learning Disabled Adult Section of Ohio ACLD

"I've been sitting here trying to figure out how many members we have. Across the state, we have about 50 people. It's increasing. In the last month, we gained two new local groups and added 14 people. Our council of learning disabled adults (which was a committee) is seven males and six females.

"There's a little history to this. We go back to around the time Rob Coursin does. I was at the New York convention where they first bought up the proposal for changing the name and adding adults to the ACLD. In Seattle, some other adults in Ohio and I spoke to parents and others in ACLD who were learning disabled.

"We had some young adults who were associated with the ACLD in Ohio with no place to go, no exact organization. Then the Board of Directors of the Ohio State ACLD came to me and said, 'Hey our national ACLD has a committee for learning disabled adults. Why don't you form a state group?

"So I said, 'Sure.' Because we'd talked about it for years. I met with the board of directors and young people from various areas of Ohio. We go with National ACLD as far as our goals. Our age range is from 14 on up. We're dealing pretty much with young unmarrieds, anyone who is trying to learn how to be an adult."

Jack Gerringer--Washington Association of Learning Disabled Adults

"One thing we emphasize is that it si an association of learning disabled adults rather than for learning disabled adults. We formed it under the conception that we had self-determination. We were a group that could handle their own affairs, so we get a bit uncomfortable with the term "for" someone. That smacks of having something administered to you, for some illness or problem you are experiencing.

It's a relatively small group. The nuclear unit is at Fort Steilacoom Community College, and therefore consists of students there. We have approximately 15 people involved, nine males and six females, most of whom are between the ages of 19-45. All of them have experienced difficulty in

employment and education. Many of them are going through remedial programs at the school.

"The purpose of the group-- primarily we're looking at advocacy in the areas of education, vocational rehabilitation, and employment. We also are involved in trying to educate the community as to what constitutes learning disability and what can be done to make adaptations in the worksite or classroom to allow for equal opportunity.

"We've been fortunate enough to make some inroads with the AFL-CIO. The AFL-CIO has a liaison with United Way, and can be contacted through the United Way liaison officer. They're very enthusiastic about learning more about this difficulty and making adaptations if possible. We're also involved in scheduling a workshop in September with the ACLD in Pierce County where we are going to be focusing primarily on learning disabled adults. I can't say that the state of Washington ACLD has been quite as supportive as the others of you, but we're kind of out in the sticks and they're feeling a bit territorial about us forming on our own. So one of the things I hope we can work with here is finding out how we can all work together cooperatively."

Tom Potter--Iowa

"I am chairman of the Iowa ACLD Youth and Adults Committee. My main actions are to go out and talk to various groups. I gave a talk at the national ACLD Convention this year, and right after that I spoke at the state convention in Inbraska. I talk all over Iowa. I've been to South Dakota. The point is to let more people know what's going on. A lot of people don't know much about it.

"I'm sure a lot of you know there are older teachers who don't want anything to do with it. We give them other ways to deal with it. We give students other ways to deal with the problems they have in school, the frustration problems, where to go for help. I give people names and numbers to call if they are not satisfied with the way the school system is handling them.

"We have various young adult groups in Iowa. I'm just starting to get one together in our area, because I really haven't had any time this year. I really can't give you a headcount of the youth and adults who are involved. I really don't know--there's quite a few, I can say that. Because ther's more and more groups forming all the time."

After the presentations by local groups of learning disabled adults, Dr. Drake stated, "We should now begin a dialogue on where we go from here. Do we all go home? Do we simply send our newsletters back and forth? The floor is completely clear for the beginning of a dialogue that I hope everyone will take part in."

A discussion was then held on education, employment rights, vocational rehabilitation, and national organizing strategies.

Many activities resulted from this meeting. A coordinating committee was formed to continue the dialogue on national organizing strategies. A meeting for the purpose of sharing experiences was organized by Richard Devine, and scheduled the next day. A slide show and a videotape about learning disabled adults were shown, and researchers used this unique gathering as an opportunity to collect data about learning disabled adults.

At the end of the meeting, Dale Brown stated, "All of us are here at the Annual Meeting of the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped are interested in rehabilitation and handicapped people. This is a fantastic opportunity to educate people on learning disabilities. In conversations, in sessions, formally, informally, whatever way you can. I'd really like people to take that as one of their responsibilities. This is the first time that learning disabled people have been invited as a group. It is important that we represent ourselves well and make our points clearly."

Learning disabled adults did talk to participants about learning disabilities. They spoke to employers about the advantages of hiring learning disabled people. They spoke with rehabilitation counselors about their unique needs. They asked questions in sessions, and talked to the exhibitors at the Annual Meeting.

They spoke to others about learning disabilities and learned about the rehabilitation process, the needs of other disabled people, and the desires of employees.

Thus another group of disabled people were given the opportunity to meet the larger community of handicapped people and professionals who work with handicapped people.

The Annual Meeting was a good opportunity for everyone.